

StarTree Innovation Case Study, Scotland: West Moss-side Centre



Case Description

General Description

West Moss-side is a multi-functional centre offering a variety of courses, where people can explore first hand the past and present uses of the moss, trees and plants from the surrounding environment. Courses include basketry, weaving using willow and other fibres, birch craft, hedgerow weaving, spoon carving and natural dyeing.

Company

West Moss-side Farm

Country

Scotland

Type of Organisation

Private

Organisation Size

Micro – run by one person, Kate Sankey

Case Source

www.westmossid.com/

Type of Innovation

Product – Experiential

Non-Timber

Value to the Market

A centre providing a space for all kinds of events including a focus on teaching traditional and contemporary crafts utilising non-timber materials, predominantly from the surrounding landscape.

Summary

West Moss-side is a centre that has been transformed from from an 19th-century steading and hay, set in a beautiful landscape of which part is a National Nature Reserve, Flanders Moss. West Moss-side prides itself on not only being a place but an experience that celebrates the surrounding environment. A wide variety of courses are offered throughout the year, all using natural materials with the majority being NTFPs. The range



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of courses has grown over the past 10 years and the place is constantly evolving. In order to diversify and offer more of an experience the centre built three yurts with ash walls and rafters and oak crowns. Trossachs Yurts provide award-winning holiday glamping experiences. They are up between March and end of October.

Company

West Moss-side (the centre) was founded in 2006 by Kate Sankey. Kate has been living in the farmhouse and farming the land since 1992. She is an environmental scientist, organic Shetland cattle farmer and skilled basketmaker.

Innovation

The West Moss-side Centre is an innovative, dedicated hub for learning skills and crafts utilising NWFPs, especially using materials from the immediate environment. The birch scrubland on Flanders Moss National Nature Reserve needs to be kept under control in order to protect the peat bog. The Shetland cattle forage and graze the birch and Kate harvests the birch too. Utilising this birch (bark, roots, branches and wood) in craft and workshops, Kate provides conservation benefits to the local environment as well as offering courses only found in a few places across Scotland.

Chronology

Kate Sankey bought the small farm and land in 1992. She knew that the small farm could not be viable so diversified her business. In 2006 she converted the farmhouse into a centre to attract people to the area, she was keen to contribute to rural community regeneration, and offer a space for craft masterclasses using materials from the local environment. The centre has grown organically and has been transformed through reuse, repair and recycling. The refurbishment was done as sustainably as possible, using local wood and secondhand materials and now attracts visitors from all over Scotland.

When turning the steading into a centre, Kate contacted the Government Farm Business Diversification Scheme (now part of the Scottish Rural Development Programme) and was provided with advice on how to produce a business plan and apply for funding. Kate also received mentoring support through the Trossachs Enterprise and Rural Mentoring Scheme (TERMS), gaining valuable marketing advice. She has subsequently acted as a mentor through TERMS to other rural entrepreneurs.

Looking to break into the broader eco-tourism market as well as enabling her to offer residential craft courses, Kate decided in late 2008 to have three authentic Krygyk yurts made from local ash. This project was partly supported by the Scottish Rural Development Programme though Kate remarked on the complicated and time-consuming process of application which took the best part of a year.

Outcome

West Moss-side offers and hosts many workshops, facilitated by Kate and other master craftspeople. The space can also be rented by outside groups as can the yurts, both of which provide sources of income. An effort has been made both in the refurbishment and in the workshop to utilise local materials. Kate herself being a basket-weaver, much of her work can be found in and around the centre. She takes her inspiration from the local surroundings and can make the most beautiful baskets from the willow she grows herself as well as straw, purple moor grass, birch and willow bark and rushes found on the farm and within Flander's Moss – nothing in this business goes to waste!

Analysis

Fostering factors for innovation:

- Entrepreneurial spirit of the owner
- Desire to contribute to rural regeneration
- Existence of adequate starting resources to initiate the business (own house, NWFP resources, craft skills)

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